

**SUMMARY OF THE  
FEDERAL PARTNERS MEETING  
JUNE 29, 1998**

The Federal Partners of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met on Monday, June 29, 1998, at 5 p.m.. Central Daylight Time (CDT) as part of the Fourth NELAC Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX. The meeting was led by Ms. Jeanne Mourrain, NELAC Director, of the Environmental Protection Agency. A list of action items is provided in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of this meeting was to assist agencies in their efforts to become accrediting authorities, to aid them in better understanding the NELAC standards and to discuss problems that may be barriers to the standards' acceptance.*

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS**

Ms. Mourrain opened the meeting by explaining that NELAC is interested in learning if there are any currently perceived significant problems in the NELAC standards that would inhibit the participation of a federal agency in the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) as accrediting authorities.

**INTENTIONS OF OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES WITH RESPECT TO NELAC**

It was noted that performance consistency for laboratories serving different programs and located in different States is seen as a significant benefit of NELAP accreditation to the agencies. The cost-savings also were acknowledged. Ms. Mourrain stated that current efforts are to ensure that the standards accommodate current EPA program requirements and adequately anticipate new requirements, such as Performance Based Measurement Systems (PBMS).

In some federal agencies, there appears to be cautious acceptance of the NELAP program but in others there is a divided opinion within the agencies on the level of involvement. In the course of the discussion, it was noted that there are slightly over 100 Navy entities and about 70 DOE entities that may be classified as a laboratory, not all of which would seek NELAP accreditation due to their limited scope of testing. It was a consensus among the Partners present that one-on-one discussions between Ms. Nancy Wentworth, Director of EPA's Quality Assurance Division, and key federal staff would help promote NELAC within their agencies.

The question was raised about the reasons for a federal agency to become a NELAC accrediting authority. The reasons include:

1. having decision-making authority over the agency's laboratories,
2. avoiding a secondary authority if auditing the laboratories internal to the agency,
3. consistency among all laboratories performing environmental measurements in the agency (uniform practices, resource savings, etc.)

The importance of consistency with internationally accepted consensus standards was reiterated. It was noted that changes to the NELAC standards are being considered by some committees that could depart from requirements of ISO Guide 25. It was the consensus of the group that the

NELAC standards remain consistent with ISO Guide 25. It was also noted that this Guide is in the process of being elevated to the status of an ISO Standard. Ms. Mourrain agreed to discuss consistency with the appropriate chairs, and to alert the NELAC Board of Directors of the impending change with respect to ISO Guide 25.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

In the ensuing discussion, the question was raised whether federal agencies, if they attained NELAP accrediting authority status, could accredit their own laboratories. This is a primary concern to the federal agencies. Following the discussion of various options, it was noted that there is long-standing understanding that this is not prohibited in the standards.

Ms. Mourrain noted that there is no current intent by EPA to make NELAP accreditation a requirement for laboratories. Ms. Wentworth added that EPA does not have statutory authority to make such a requirement. Advantages could include a NELAP-accredited laboratory not being required to submit to pre-award audits.

As a point of information, Ms. Maude Bullock distributed copies of a draft of consolidated comments from the Department of Defense that she anticipates will be appropriately signed in the next few weeks to be forwarded to NELAC for consideration.

## **NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that a teleconference following the Fourth NELAC Annual Meeting would be helpful to discuss “next steps” which Ms. Mourrain will arrange with this group after a suitable interval.

**ACTION ITEMS  
FEDERAL PARTNERS MEETING  
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<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Date To Be Completed</b>
1.	Ms Mourrain will discuss with appropriate committee chairs and the NELAC Board of Directors recent proposed changes to the Quality Systems chapter with respect to consistency with ISO Guide 25	
2.	Ms. Wentworth will meet with staff of the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy to outline the advantages of becoming a NELAP accrediting authority.	
3.	Ms. Mourrain will arrange a follow-up teleconference following the Fourth NELAC Annual Meeting to discuss next steps.	

**PARTICIPANTS  
FEDERAL PARTNERS MEETING  
JUNE 29, 1998**

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